News from the Savannah River National Laboratory

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Savannah River Technology Center Assists in New York

Aiken, S.C. Late last week, the Savannah River Technology Center (SRTC) dispatched four employees with sophisticated, remotely operated equipment to assist with the search and rescue efforts in New York City. SRTC is the Savannah River Site's applied research and development laboratory.

This assistance is being provided by SRTC's Law Enforcement Technology Support Center, at the request of the U.S. Department of Justice. Under an agreement between the U.S. Department of Energy (which owns the Savannah River Site) and the Justice Department's National Institute of Justice, SRTC provides a variety of technology support for law enforcement efforts.

From their base just yards from the World Trade Center location, the SRTC personnel are assisting the Federal Emergency Management Agency and the New York City Fire Department by providing much needed on-the-spot fabrication of unique technologies for use by the search and rescue teams at the World Trade Center. Workers come to them with a special need, and the team members come up with a suitable tool, prepare it for deployment and show the workers how to use it – often within 15 minutes.

The SRTC personnel took with them infrared cameras, microphones, robotic equipment, crawlers, fiber optic cameras, borescopes (similar to medical scopes) and other tools to search for victims and evidence. The video cameras and scopes can be used to allow personnel to see into confined spaces and into areas that are too small or too dangerous for humans to enter. The crawlers and other types of remote equipment are capable of carrying and using tools, such as micro-cameras and microphones in these small or hazardous spaces.

They are adapting technologies developed and used in site applications to apply to this important effort. For example, they adapted a video camera device originally designed to look into various nuclear facilities and components, which is being used to probe cavities below ground.

They have adapted camera equipment to place on the dogs that are sent into cavities. They have also prepared cameras on cables that are lowered into holes beneath the rubble. As of Thursday, Sept. 20, they had just completed mounting cameras on the surrounding buildings to provide complete coverage of the area, both to assist in the search, and to help protect the safety of the rescue workers.

The first four employees with their two trucks of equipment left SRS around noon on Thursday and began work early Friday morning. Team members are Todd Coleman, Program Manager for SRTC's Law Enforcement Technology Support Center; and Frank Heckendorn, David Martinez and Bob Fogle of SRTC's Remote and Specialty Equipment Group (RSE). This week, Coleman and Martinez returned, replaced by Montenius Collins and Cassey Robinson, also of RSE.

According to Coleman, “Everyone is delighted to be asked, and willing to go and serve at a time when our nation needs everyone to pull together.” The support they have been receiving – both moral support and logistical assistance – has been tremendous, he said. As they leave the recovery area at night, people line the streets holding signs thanking all of the search and rescue personnel for their efforts.

Making use of the Savannah River Technology Center’s unique capabilities the National Institute of Justice (NIJ) last year named SRTC as its partner in providing unique technology assistance to help local and regional law enforcement and corrections agencies gather and analyze evidence.

SRTC provides a variety of tools and expertise to local and regional law enforcement and corrections agencies – technologies to which they would not otherwise have access.

The Savannah River Technology Center is the applied research and development laboratory at the Department of Energy’s Savannah River Site. For approximately 50 years, SRTC has developed and put into use technologies needed to operate SRS. Its work developing techniques to monitor the site’s impact on the environment and to maintain accountability of nuclear materials evolved into skills and technologies used in international nuclear nonproliferation. That work, in turn, led to the development of expertise and tools for evidence-gathering and highly sensitive analyses that also have usefulness in law enforcement and related efforts.

NOTE: Photos and video footage (with sound bites) of the team packing to leave are available

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